

Testimony before the Judiciary Committee  
House Bill 6386 AN ACT DELAYING IMPLEMNETATION OF LEGISLATION  
RAISING THE AGE OF JUVENILE JURISDICATION  
Submitted by Melissa Aiello  
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Senator McDonald, Representative Lawler and other members of the judiciary committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Melissa Aiello. I live in the town of Bloomfield. I am a student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. I am currently employed at a local therapeutic group home for adolescent females with severe trauma histories who are a part of the juvenile justice system.

I am here today to offer my opposition of the House Bill 6386 "AN ACT DELAYING IMPLEMNETATION OF LEGISLATION RAISING THE AGE OF JUVENILE JURISDICATION".

A 16-year old in the state of Connecticut is prohibited by law to purchase any tobacco products and alcohol beverages, they cannot vote, and they cannot register to participate in the armed forces. But yet, at 16, they can be processed as an adult for minor and non-violent crimes in the judicial system. According to the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics, Connecticut locks up more children in adult prisons than any other state in the nation.

The youth that are tried as adults, face numerous uphill battles once they return to their community. They receive less support services, they have a difficulty finding and keeping a job because of their criminal record, and they are subject to an increased stigma and labeling by others.

Working at the group home, I have encountered many young women that have fallen into peer pressure. They are vulnerable at this age and engage in negative and other unsavory behaviors because they wanted to "fit in".

First instance, one 16 year- old girl was involved in a minor altercation at school because she wanted her peers to notice her. In the end, her desire to be popular got her over two weeks in the Niantic prison. During her stay at Niantic, she was socializing with rapist, murders, and predators. Once she left, I thought her negative behaviors would decrease. But yet, she continued in a downward spiral instead of progressing. She picked up poor habits while in jail, and tried to influence her peers to partake in poor decision making. She is constantly looked down by her peers and others that are aware of her criminal background. If she had the opportunity to remain in the juvenile courts, and the chance to be involved in rehabilitation services, and be able to get a job because she did not have to check the box "yes" if one has committed a felony. I believe she would be an aspiring young woman that would be a positive role model for her peers. But she was not offered these services because of her age and now she is struggling to get by, and does so by lying, through violence, and poor decision making.

Our youth deserve better. They deserve a second chance. They deserve to become a part of system that does not look down on them for their past experiences, but yet provide them with experiences and programs that would help them become strong, dependable and influential adults.

We live in a world of broken promises. Please do not continue the cycle of lies that our children have now grown accustomed to. Please continue to support the implementation of Raise the Age that would be ready by January 1, 2010.

Thank you for opportunity to speak to you today.